Enriching Knowledge Series:
3) Improving English Pronunciation and Speaking Skills

The Centre for Applied English Studies at The University of Hong Kong

1. Introduction: Workshop Description & Aims

This workshop, part of our ENRICHING KNOWLEDGE SERIES, is designed as a platform for knowledge sharing among educators, focusing on enriching your understanding and expertise without specific pedagogical training. You are encouraged to exchange ideas and insights, reflecting on how any new knowledge can be integrated into and enhance your teaching practice or curriculum.

Participants will engage in a three-part series:

Part 1: What You Know

- You will evaluate your current knowledge and perceptions of pronunciation teaching methods.

Part 2: Revise & Review

- A review and overview of the evidence-based core sounds that are vital for intelligible English pronunciation.

Part 3: Application & Practice

- You will engage in practice to evaluate and reflect on the relevance of the core principles for your specific teaching environments.

2. Workshop Objectives:

By the end of this session, you will have an improved awareness of:

- The key phonetic elements that contribute to intelligibility according to research in English pronunciation as outlined by the Lingua Franca Core (LFC)
- The importance and effectiveness of the sounds central to the LFC in various teaching and communicative contexts.
- Strategic approaches for applying the principles in classroom settings to foster clearer, more universally understandable communication among English learners

1.1. Warm-up – Getting to Know You

1.1. In your groups, discuss your answers to the following questions:

1. What are your current practices for teaching speaking and pronunciation skills to your students?
2. In your educational context, how important is the teaching of speaking and pronunciation? How much emphasis does your curriculum place on these skills?

1.2. Which Options Are Correct?

The most common English accent in the world is:

E: Non-native-speaker English

- There are more speakers of American English (310 million!) than of Australian or British English
- According to estimates in 2021, there are 125 million first-language speakers of English in India
- The UK has around 58 million first-language speakers of English according to a government census
- Generally, there are around 373 million native speakers of English globally
- There are around 1,100 million non-native speakers of English worldwide

Therefore, there are more non-native speakers of English worldwide than there are native speakers!

Walker and Archer (2024, p.14)

1.2. Which Options Are Correct?

The most easily understood accent in the world is:

There is no single correct answer to this.

- A native-speaker accent is not automatically the most intelligible.
- Non-native speakers who use English for international communication outside the classroom environment regularly report that they find other non-native speakers of English easier to understand than native speakers.

Walker and Archer (2024, p.14)

1.2. Which Options Are Correct?

The percentage of problems of intelligibility in English that are the result of poor pronunciation is:

D: 63%

According to research, problems with grammar only accounted for 4% of breakdowns in communication with vocabulary being the cause of around 30% of misunderstandings.

Most of these problems of intelligibility are due to the poor pronunciation of:

There is no single correct answer to this.

Researchers have presented some areas of pronunciation that are key to intelligibility and we will look at this today.

Walker and Archer (2024, p.14)
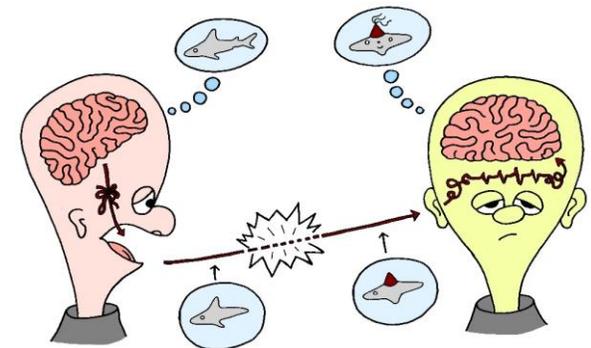
1.2. Which Options Are Correct?

Good English pronunciation is:

D: Easily intelligible to whoever you are talking to

Even if you are a native speaker, your aim should be to make yourself understood by your listener(s). The most competent speakers can modify their pronunciation to help any listener who is struggling to understand them.

(Chia Suan Chong, 2016; Jenkins, 2016; Walker and Archer 2024)

1.3. True or False?

1. The speaking part of international English language exams judges pronunciation on its nearness to a near-native-speaker accent. **False!** Most of the major EFL exam boards (Cambridge, Trinity College, TOEFL, etc.) judge intelligibility and ease of understanding when assessing pronunciation.

2. It is easier to learn to be internationally intelligible than to learn to speak English with a native-speaker accent. **True!** The workload required to sound intelligible is lighter than the workload required to sound like a native-speaker

3. Teachers don't need to be native speakers in order to teach the pronunciation of international intelligibility well. **True!** Sometimes non-native teachers can draw on personal experience of learning to do what they are asking their learners to do. They also have good knowledge of the students' first-language phonology and the challenges it may present.

4. A speaker who is Japanese or French can sound as if they are from Japan and France and still be completely intelligible. **True!** The key is for the speaker to be intelligible.

Walker and Archer (2024)

1.4. Terminology Quiz: Part 1 – Concepts

Work with a partner. Choose the correct word from the box below to complete the gaps.

1. **Phoneme**: a sound that makes up part of a word in a language, and distinguishes that word from another, e.g., the /t/ sound in tin. **Symbols** are used to represent phonemes.
2. IPA – International **Phonetic** Alphabet → Uses symbols to show individual phonemes and other identifiable, specific features of human speech. This is commonly referred to as phonetic or **narrow** transcription (Carley et al. 2018).
3. Dictionaries commonly use phonemic transcription, AKA **broad** transcription i.e., a general description of how a word or phrase sounds (Carley et al., 2018).
4. **Elision** is the omission of one or more sounds in a word or phrase, especially a consonant sound, to make language easier to say. For example, the 't' in postman /pəʊsmən/.
5. Phonology: The study of where **sounds** appear in a language.
6. The **glottal** stop is a stop sound or a short gap and interruption to the airflow in speaking made by rapidly closing the vocal cords. It usually forms part of elision. For example, the 't' in butter: bu'er in some varieties of English.
7. 'Phonics': An **educational** method which separates words into individual and combined sounds.
8. **Nuclear** stress is the placement of stress in a syllable or in a sentence in order to create contrast or emphasis. 'Let's meet NEXT Saturday' and 'Let's meet next SATURDAY'.

1.5. Terminology Quiz: Part 2 – Sounds - Answers

Choose the best option. An example has been done for you.

1. Vowel sounds (e.g., /e/): Sounds in which the airflow **is not** blocked.
2. Monophthong /ˈmɒn.əf.θɒŋ/ (e.g., /æ/): **One** vowel sound.
3. Diphthong /ˈdɪfθɒŋ/ (e.g., /ɔɪ/): **Two** vowel sounds.
4. Consonant sounds (e.g., /b/): Airflow **is** blocked.
5. Voiced consonants (e.g., /b/): The vocal cords **do** vibrate.
6. Unvoiced consonants (e.g., /p/): The vocal cords **do not** vibrate.
7. Minimal pairs (e.g., 'bin' and 'pin'): Two words that are different in **one** sound
8. Weak forms: How monosyllabic grammatical words (e.g., 'does', 'have') are pronounced when they **are not** stressed in connected speech (Underhill, 2005).
9. Strong forms: How grammatical words (e.g., 'does', 'have') are pronounced when they **are** emphasized in speech (Underhill, 2005).
10. Intonation: The **rise and fall** of the voice during speech.
11. Bonus question: When we whisper, do we use our vocal cords? **No!**

2.1 Phonemes: Charts & Symbols

What are some benefits and limitations of using phonemic charts, such as the one designed by Adrian Underhill, in teaching pronunciation?

Single vowel sounds (monophthongs)

diphthongs

Consonant sounds
1. Plosives
2. Frictions
3. Nasals and others

Source: https://adrianunderhill.com/the-pronunciation-charts/

The IPA Chart

the international phonetic alphabet (2005)

Global English - The Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

In a Nutshell: The LFC identifies four areas where it is thought to be essential to eliminate error from a speaker's pronunciation if they want to be intelligible in communication:

1. Individual consonant sounds (with some exceptions)
2. Consonant clusters (with some exceptions)
3. Short versus long vowels
4. Appropriate word grouping and placement of nuclear stress

(Walker, 2010)

Consonant Sounds

The LFC requires speakers to be competent, both receptively and productively, in all consonant sounds. Learners who struggle tend to substitute the consonants they can't produce with sounds they can produce and this can cause confusion for both native speaker and non-native speaker listeners.

What are the problematic consonant sounds for this German coastguard in this advert?

"Hello, zis is zee German coastguard.
What are you sinking about?"

This advert highlights 2 of the most difficult consonant sounds in English. The voiced and voiceless 'th' sounds, /θ/ and /ð/, as in the words 'think' and 'this'. These are **dental fricatives.** These sounds don't exist in many languages in the world. They don't exist in Mandarin or Cantonese. Can you and your learners pronounce them?

Consonant Sounds /θ/ and /ð/

Thankfully an exception is made for /θ/ and /ð/ in speaking and substitution is acceptable. Why? These sounds are substituted in some native-speaker varieties of English.

1. Irish: /θ/ is substituted with /t/ (three> tree)
2. Cockney English: /θ/ is substituted with /f/ (thanks> fanks) and /ð/ is substituted with /v/ in some words (Other>Over)
3. Some Estuary English: as in Cockney
4. MLE (Multicultural London English): /θ/ is substituted with /f/ and /ð/ is substituted with /d/ in some words (they>day). Notice how Raheem Sterling pronounces /θ/ in the word 'thought' and /ð/ in the word 'this' in this video from 3:32:

1. How about you? Do you substitute the /θ/ ? What do you substitute it with? Say 333,000.
2. Say "The other day". Do you substitute the /ð/ ? With what?

Fun Fact: Substituting these sounds can enhance intelligibility in some situations. In the aviation industry, pilots are required to pronounce the /θ/ as /t/ like Irish English so "three" becomes "tree". /θ/ can be harder to decipher over radio transmissions where sound quality can vary. Learn more here.

Consonant Sounds /p/, /t/ and /k/

Aspiration in /p/, /t/ and /k/ (**plosives**) is needed according to the LFC

If speakers fail to aspirate /p/, /t/ and /k/ adequately, they will make 'pear' sound like 'bear', 'tin' sounds like 'din', 'coat' like 'goat', and so on. Correct aspiration of /p. t. k/ is essential for intelligibility.

Voiceless consonants							
p	t	tʃ	k	f	θ	s	ʃ

Voiced consonants							
b	d	dʒ	g	v	ð	z	ʒ

Other consonants							
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

(Walker, 2010)

Consonant Sound /t/

What do you think the LFC proposes when it comes to pronunciation of the /t/ in the middle of words? American or British? Think "Italy"

"Can I have/get a bottle of water?"

The LFC proposes that learners use the RP or standard British English /t/ in preference to the American English alternative (flapped) when 't' comes between vowels. Dropping the /t/, which is done in some varieties of British English (Cockney, MLE, maybe Estuary etc.) is also not recommended as it can cause misunderstanding. This is called the **glottal stop.** What about /t/ at the end of words? It depends how it blends with the next word.

Consonant Sound /r/

Like /θ/ and /ð/, the /r/ sound is one of the most difficult sounds to produce for learners and has different variations across native speakers and languages across the world. E.g.:

[r]   This is /r/ as a trill [r] in Scottish English. Also common in Spanish, Arabic and Russian

[ʁ]   The uvular [ʁ] which is made in the throat and is characteristic of French and southern German accents of English

[ɹ]   This is the most common variant of /r/ in native-speaker Englishes. The sound that is made by holding the tip of the tongue just behind the alveolar ridge, but without any contact being made. The symbol generally represents the "rhotic retroflex approximant" /r/

According to the LFC, /r/ should be pronounced as in General American pronunciation rather than dropped as it is in some British accents. E.g. 'car' /kɑr/ versus /kɑ:/. This **rhotic retroflex approximant** also exists in some British accents.

(Walker, 2010)

Consonant Clusters

Clusters are not common to all languages, and even when they are, not all languages allow the same combinations of consonants. To tackle the difficulty, learners do 2 things:

• deletion of one of the consonants in the cluster. E.g. "Poduct" instead of "Product"

• insertion of a short [ɪ]- or [e]-like vowel between two of the consonants. The insertion of a short /e/ is typical of Spanish-L1 accented English whenever a word begins 's+consonant'. Thus, 'Spain', with an initial cluster that is not found in Spanish, is pronounced [eˈspeɪn].

Although deletion is not an acceptable strategy in word-initial clusters, it can be used with certain clusters that occur in the middle or at the end of words in English. Native speakers commonly pronounce words like 'postman', 'aspects' or 'next week' as [ˈpəʊsmən], [ˈæspeks] and [neksˈwiːk]. In all three examples the /t/ in the middle of the respective cluster has been deleted. The deletion of sounds is known as **elision** and is characteristic of native-speaker English.

(Walker, 2010)

Vowel sounds

There is far more variation in the vowels of English than in the consonants. E.g.: BAT.
In New Zealand and South African English, it can sound like BET. Misunderstandings can even occur between native speakers due to different vowel variations:

Despite this variation, the LFC asserts that teachers and learners should focus their attention on the long-short differences between vowels to avoid misunderstanding.

Nuclear Stress: Thought Groups or Tone Units

Speakers divide what they say into groups of words. Various names have been given to these naturally occurring groups of words, including tone units, thought groups, and word groups etc. These break the speech flow up into manageable, meaningful blocks of information.

In the LFC, this must be maintained. Using nuclear stress inappropriately can confuse listeners by drawing their attention to the wrong part of the message.

Breaking speech up into word groups is especially valuable in monologues such as a lectures, presentations, public speaking or poetry recital. Not pausing adequately, can have a serious impact on intelligibility.

a) 'We can expect heavy rain in the southwest from Monday onwards. The situation will improve slowly.'

Versus:

b) 'We can expect heavy rain in the southwest. From Monday onwards, the situation will improve slowly.'

Nuclear Stress Placement: Prominence

In standalone or single tone-unit words, one syllable is often prominent and dictionaries will highlight where this is:

// **Ja**panESE //

'-ese' has **primary** word stress and 'Jap-' has **secondary** word stress.

However, this prominence may change and can be determined by the speaker depending on the message they want to convey when words are put together to form a longer 'tone unit' or 'intonation contour' (Lane, 2010; Underhill, 2005). Lane (2010) defines an intonation contour as a pattern of intonation across a thought group, which is a bit like a musical phrase.

// ACtually she's japaNESE //
// a JApanese SHIP-owner's been / KIDnapped //
// I thought SHE was japanese // NOT HIM//

(McCarthy, 1991, p.95)

2.2 English as a Global Language-The Lingua Franca Core Part 1

2.2. Match the following examples below to the descriptions in the table

1. **Consonant Conflations**: Korean learner: "coffee" "copy" /f/ → /p/ Japanese learner: "fan" → "pan" /f/ → /p/ French learner: "this" → "zis" /ð/ → /z/

2. **Vowel Length**: "seat" → "sit" /iː/ → /ɪ/

3. **Consonant Cluster Simplification**: "help" → "he-ru-pu" "true" → "turu" "Strange" →"estrange"

4. **Nuclear Stress**: A student says "I NEED coffee, not tea." Instead of "I need COFFEE, not tea."

5. **Segmentation/Tonal Unit:** Let's eat Grandma and I have three hour-long exams

Part 2 - Do your learners face challenges in any of these categories?

Area of Pronunciation	Examples
Vowel Length	daughter, caught, game, work (Some Cantonese learners may confuse /ɜː/ with /ɔː/), join
Consonant Conflations	knowledge, sue, zoo, very
Consonant cluster simplification	proposal, skyscraper
Prominence and Weak Forms	
Tone Groups	
Placement of Nuclear/contrastive stress	robot

Part 2 - Do your learners face challenges in any of these categories?

1. **Daughter**: Learners might shorten the vowel sound in "daughter" and pronounce it more like "doctor" with a shorter vowel sound.
2. **Robot**: They might stress the wrong syllable in "robot" and pronounce it more like "Robert" with the stress on the first syllable due to shortening of the vowel.
3. **Game and join**: Cantonese speakers might have difficulty with the English diphthongs /eɪ/ in "game." or /ɔɪ/ in "join". They might simplify it to a monophthong /e/ or /æː/, so "game" might be pronounced as "gem" or "gam" and "join" becomes "jon" or "John" /dʒɒn/
4. **Work**: This is pronounced with a central vowel /ɜː/ while "walk" features a back rounded vowel /ɔː/. HK learners can struggle both receptively and productively with these distinct vowels.
5. **Skyscraper**: Cantonese speakers might struggle with the consonant cluster /skr/ in "skyscraper." They might drop one of the consonants, resulting in a pronunciation like "skycrapper" or "skycraper" with a simplified cluster.
6. **Knowledge**: Cantonese speakers might substitute the "n" sound with an "l" sound in "knowledge". Therefore, "knowledge" might be pronounced as "lowledge".
7. **Proposal**: Learners might have difficulty with the consonant cluster /pr/ in "proposal." They might drop the "r" sound and pronounce it as "poposal" with a simplified cluster. Additionally, the second "o" sound might be pronounced as a short vowel instead of a diphthong, resulting in a pronunciation like /pəˈpozə/.
8. **Caught**: This may be pronounced with a short vowel sound instead of the long vowel so it might sound like "cot".
9. **Sue**: HK learners might have difficulty with the "s" sound followed by the "u" sound in "sue." They might pronounce it more like "shu" with a palatalized /ʃ/ sound instead of the unpalatalized /s/ sound.
10. **Very**: The /v/ sound is often substituted with /w/, particularly at the beginning of words so "very" sounds like "wary".
11. **Zoo**: The voiced /z/ (zoo) is often substituted with the voiceless /s/ (soo) or as stated above, may also become "shu".

2.3 Identifying Pronunciation Issues

Listen to the following audio clips.

1. What issues can you identify in each clip? Add them to the categories in your handout.
2. What feedback would you give the student?

Student 1 *I support your point ...and I think the homeless people face ..uh... face problem...is uh...they maybe will have uh... pressure.*	
Student 2 *Yes, absolute is...It is because the children are ...you mean that...uh children are copy the homeworks in the internet then I think that...uh...why student are cheating? Because they are...think that...the homeworks is ...so difficult.*	

2.3 Identifying Pronunciation Issues

Area of Pronunciation	Examples
Vowel Length	
Consonant Conflations	
Consonant cluster simplification	
Tone Groups	cause more strain than the lack of connected speech.
Placement of Nuclear/contrastive stress	

2.4. Reflecting on Incorporating Pronunciation Challenges into Teaching

Step 1: In your designated groups, consider which aspects of pronunciation in your contexts are most problematic or neglected in current teaching practices.

Step 2: Go through and choose 1 or 2 pronunciation teaching activities provided in this handout.

Step 3: Use the following checklist to evaluate the selected activity:

1. Is the activity age-appropriate for your students?

2. Could the activity be adapted to suit your context? How?

3. Is the activity engaging and likely to maintain students' interest?

4. Does the activity effectively address key pronunciation challenges for your learners?

5. Does the activity provide opportunities for feedback to your students about their pronunciation?

Step 4: Based on your evaluation, discuss potential modifications to make the activity more effective and suitable for your students and discuss where it could apply in your curriculum.

Step 5: Select a spokesperson from your group to present your ideas outlining the original activity, your evaluation, proposed modifications, and how and where it could fit into your curriculum.

If you have another idea for a pronunciation activity not highlighted in this handout that you feel would significantly enhance speech intelligibility, please prepare to share this idea during your presentation.

Activities for Vowel Length Focus
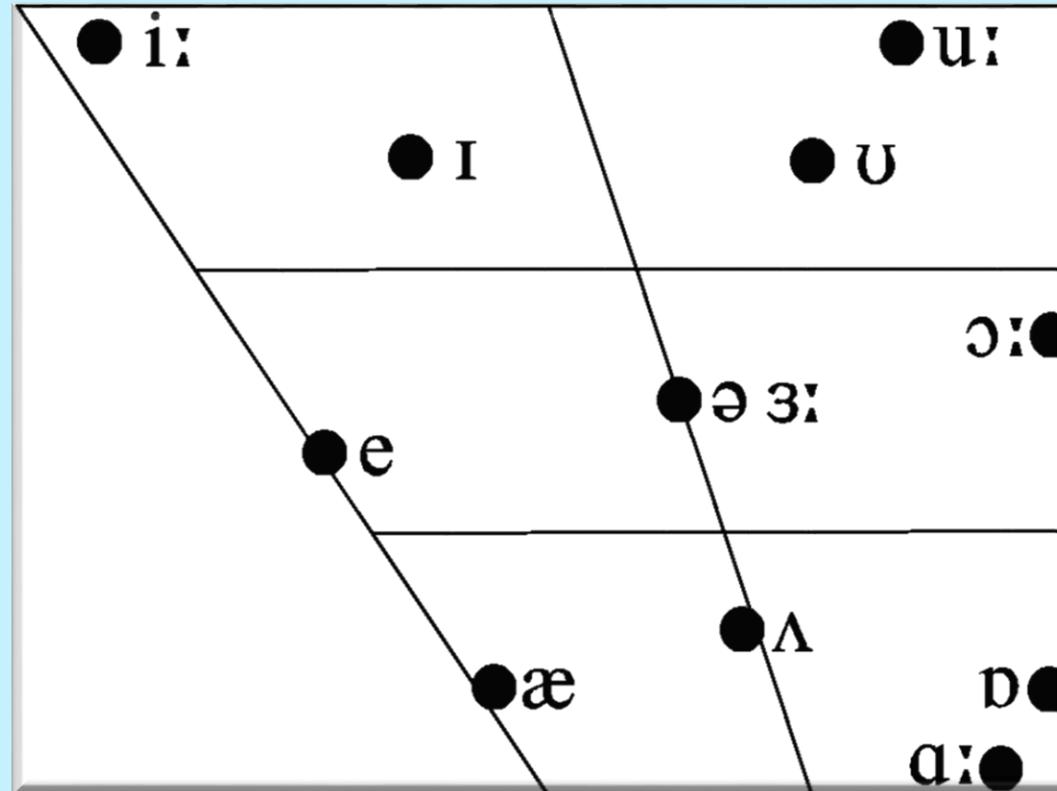
Activity 1 - Categorizing Vowel Sounds

Put students into groups/pairs. Provide each group with the words on individual cards/slips of paper so they can physically move them around when categorizing them. If you are working online, this could be a digital platform with a drag and drop feature as shown below. Invite students to drag and drop words to different sections of their screens in accordance with their sound or type the word into the designated category.
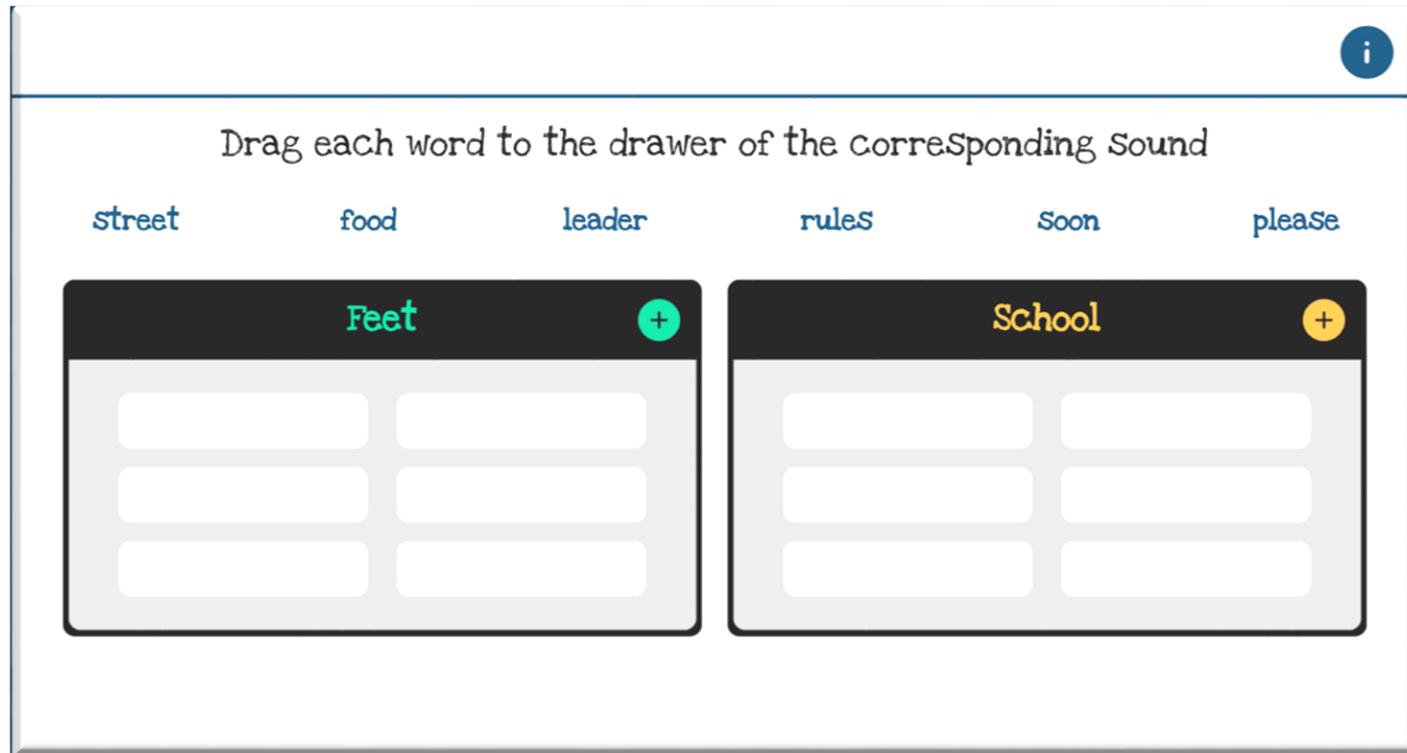
Activity 2 Vowel Length

1. Practise the following sounds. Notice how the vowel quality changes (Carley et al., 2018).

a)   Chip vs cheap /ʧɪp/ → /ʧiːp/

b)   full vs fool /fʊl/ → /fuːl/

c)   Knot vs naught /nɒt/ → /nɔːt/

d)   Pill vs peel /pɪl/ → /piːl/

e)   Bin vs bean /bɪn/ → /biːn/

f)   Cat vs cart /kæt/ → /kɑːt/

g)   Forget vs her→ /fəˈgɛt/ → /hɜː/

Activity 2 Vowel Length

Work in pairs. Student A: Choose a sentence to read aloud. Student B: Listen and choose the correct option.

Class: Listen and vote for the correct option.

1a. You can get vitamin C from orange peels.

1b. You can get vitamin C from orange pills.

2a. There's a bean on the kitchen counter.

2b. There's a bin on the kitchen counter.

3a. The horse beat the dog in the race.

3b. The horse bit the dog in the race.

Takeaway tip: Activities like this should have believable sentences so that the correct choice cannot be guessed from the context!

Activity 4 Vowel Length with Diphthongs

This activity uses images to visually highlight the difference in the length of a vowel when followed by a voiced or unvoiced consonant. Select a minimal pair that only differs in consonant sound.

bag> back
cap>cab
price>prize

Activity 5 Diphthongs

Some learners may find diphthongs difficult, and either shorten or replace diphthong sounds. The following sentence pairs highlight some common examples (see Education University of Hong Kong [EdUHK], 2023 for more details).

1) Missing second vowel: /ɔɪ/ becomes /ɒ/ (e.g., coin vs con)

2) Vowel replacement: /eɪ/ becomes /æ/ (e.g., same vs Sam), /e/ (e.g., sail vs sell), or /ɪ/ (e.g., take vs tick).

Student A: Choose a sentence to read aloud; Student B: Listen and choose the correct option.

1a. Bank tellers deal with coins every day.

1b. Bank tellers deal with cons every day.

2a. Can you take this box for me?

2b. Can you tick this box for me?

3a. They went to sail the boat.

3b. They went to sell the boat.

Activities for Consonant Focus

Voiceless consonants

p	t	tʃ	k	f	θ	s	ʃ

Voiced consonants

b	d	dʒ	g	v	ð	z	ʒ

Other consonants

m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Activity 1 - Word initial sounds: /v/and /r/ vs /w/, and /n/ vs /l/

It can help to focus on how and where these initial sounds are produced.

•Spelling rules can make this confusing!

•Advice: Teach sets of words with similar sound-spelling connections.

Listen to a volunteer from Table …. Which word do you hear, 1, 2 or 3?

	1	2	3
	/v/	/w/	/r/
a	vary	wary	
b	veil	whale	rail
c		where	rare
d		white	right
e		white	write
f		Wong	wrong
	/n/	/l/	/r/
g	night	light	right
h	know	low	row

Activity 1 - Word initial sounds: /v/and /r/ vs /w/, and /n/ vs /l/

- Chan (n.d.) explains that /v/ and /r/ sounds when they appear at the start of words can be tricky for learners, who may replace these sounds with /w/. Sometimes this can create a new word, or simply make the speaker difficult to understand.
- The distinction between /n/ and /l/ at the start of words is also important in order to maintain communication (Chan, n.d.)
- Listen and mimic the teacher!

/v/	/w/	/r/
veil	whale	rail

/n/	/l/
night	light

Activity 2 - Initial consonant clusters /pr/ vs /pl/

The following consonant clusters are important for intelligibility. Students in Hong Kong often replace /r/ with /l/, which can impede communication and sometimes change the meaning of the word (Chan, n.d.).

Listen to the following sounds: **/pr/ vs /pl/**

- Prod vs plod vs pod
- Prow vs plough vs pow
- Pray vs play vs pay

Listen to the following sentences. Notice what happens to the meaning of each sentence when a mistake occurs!

- I was proud of how they played. They worked hard for their prize.

  /praʊd/   /pleɪd/   /praɪz/

- I loved the present – it was a pleasant surprise.

  /ˈprezənt/   **/**ˈplezənt/

- The police gave a press release which started at 4pm and ended at 5.

  /pəˈliːs/   /pres rɪˈliːs/

Activity 3 Initial consonant clusters /fr/ vs /fl/ and /gr/ vs /gl/

Part 1-Listen to the following sounds: /fr/ vs /fl/ and /gr/ vs /gl/

- Free vs flee vs fee
- Fright vs flight vs fight
- Green vs glean
- Grass vs glass vs gas

Part 2-Work in small groups. Practise reading the following tongue twisters aloud.

- I got a fright when I saw the fee for the 'free' flight.
- A frequent flier got into a fight with a flight attendant.
- The green grass grew between the glass bottles.

Part 3-Try the following tongue twister:

1. **The man's last task was to cut the crisp crops.**
2. **We popped to the shops and got some crisps, masks and pots.**

Activity 4 Practice: Elision in Consonant Clusters in the Middle of Sentences

Use the following sentences to either identify, listen for or read aloud where the /t/, /d/ sounds are dropped or preserved if they come before voiced consonants or /h/. Note that /t/ and /d/ will be dropped regardless of rules of intelligibility if the accent always drops these (E.g. Cockney).

The black cat sat on the mat.

Focus on dropping the /t/ in "cat" and preserving it in "sat." If it's dropped in "sat" then this is a glottal stop adopted in some accents (E.g. Cockney) rather than the usual elision that may happen across many Englishes. RP would preserve /t/ on 'sat' to blend with the vowel that comes after. This is known as catenation.

It's a cold night outside the house.

Focus on dropping the /d/ in "cold" and the /d/ in "outside".

I'm excited about the new book.

Focus on preserving the /d/ in "excited" due to the vowel sound that come after (catenation) and dropping the /t/ in "about".

She bought three hundred hats.

Focus on dropping the /t/ in "bought" and keeping the /d/ in "hundred" as /h/ follows the /d/.

Activity 5 - Vowels and Consonants Together

Work in small groups. Take turns to accurately produce the commonly mistaken vowel and consonant sounds in bold. Discuss the main reasons for the problem(s) highlighted in bold in each example.

1. **Have** a **salad** made of **eggs** and **apples**. (/e/ vs /æ/)

2. I bought a box of **green beans**. (/I/ vs /iː/)

3. The **boy** threw a **coin** into the well. (full diphthongs)

4. Can you **take** this box for me? (full diphthongs)

5. She likes to **play** tennis in her **free** time. (consonant clusters)

6. The dog was **very** wary of the postman. (/v/ vs /w/ vs /f/)

7. She put her **clothes** in the suitcase. (plural endings)

8. We **popped** to the **shops** and got some **crisps**, **masks** and **pots**. (past tense –ed endings; final consonant clusters)

Activities for Prosody, Word and Sentence Stress

Activity 1 Identifying the stress patterns - answers

Which syllable holds the main stress? See the CAPITALISED syllable.

Is the word a single compound noun? If so, which syllable holds the main stress? Hairbrush and notebook. The first syllable usually holds the main stress.

Does the word have both primary and secondary stress? Some words have both as seen captured in bold (secondary) and capital letters (primary) above.

Activity 2 Noun-verb stress patterns

In words with the same spelling in the noun and verb forms, there is often a difference in word stress. Identify where the main stress occurs in each repeated word, and summarize the general rule.

1. Please **record** the meeting so that we have a **record** of the discussion.
2. In order to have an **increase** in sales, we need to **increase** our advertising budget.
3. We need to **decrease** spending to see a **decrease** in debt.*
4. Before we **imported** the goods, we secured an **import** license.
5. After we **exported** the goods, we received an **export** summary.
6. Don't **discount** the savings after **discounts**!
7. **Refunds** can only be **refunded** in store.
8. Please **permit** the officer to check your **permit**.
9. The managers felt **conflicted** over their **conflict** of interests.
10. If you don't agree with the result of the **contest**, you can **contest** it in court.
11. I was **insulted** by her **insult**.
12. The **rebels rebelled** against the decision.
13. The **survey surveyed** public opinion.
14. The **details** were **detailed** in the document.*
15. We **conducted** a workshop about good **conduct** at work.
16. The **object** of the meeting is to learn how to **object** to meetings.

Noun form: stress 1st syllable
Verb form: stress 2nd syllable
*Stress varies depending on variety of English, e.g. BrE or AmE.

Activity 3 The connection between thought groups, intonation and pausing

Close your booklet. Listen to a recording of a short text without an effective use of pauses, stress, weak forms and intonation.

Is it easy to follow? Why (not)?

In many parts of Italy margherita pizzas are often described as the only true pizzas for many people other toppings and extras spoil the flavour pepperoni pizzas have consistently ranked as the most popular pizza outside of Italy

Where would you add punctuation, pauses, stress and weak forms?

Activity 3 The connection between thought groups, intonation and pausing

Compare your answers.

In many parts of Italy, margherita pizzas are often said to be the only true

pizzas. For many people, other toppings and extras spoil the flavour.

Pepperoni pizza has consistently ranked as the most popular type of pizza

outside of Italy.

Activity 3 The connection between thought groups, intonation and pausing

Noun phrases	Verb phrases	Prepositional phrases
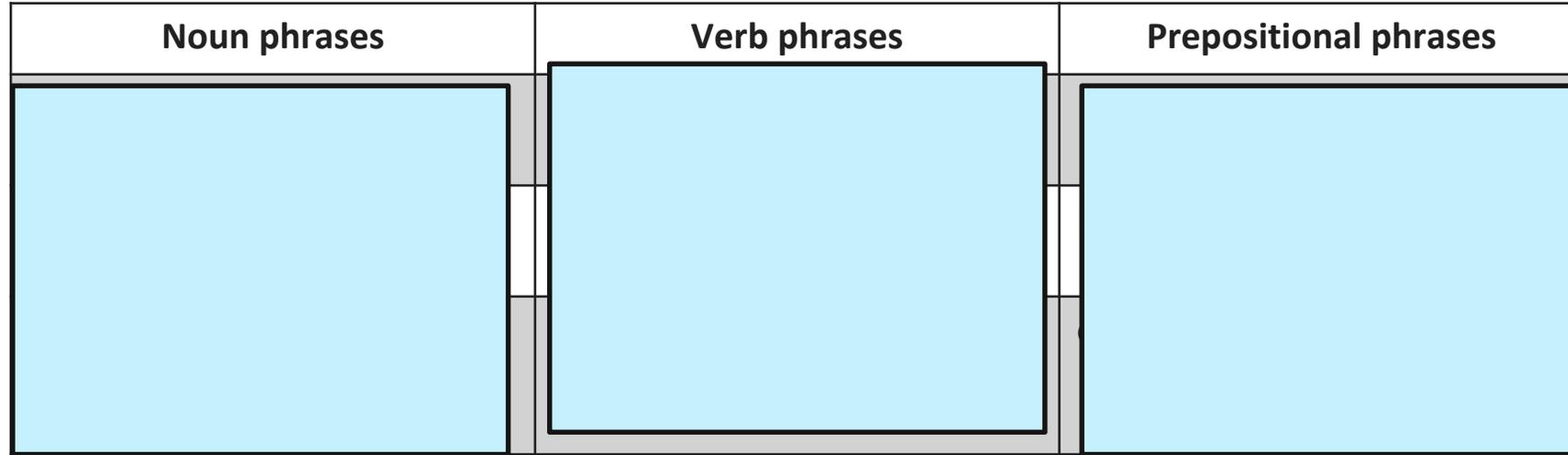
When deciding on where to include pauses, you can start by dividing sentences into clauses. Grammatical phrases in spoken language are often referred to as 'thought groups' (Lane, 2010; Underhill, 2005). There can sometimes be a very short pause, or a moment of suspension, between thought groups.

Spoken utterances also have their own 'intonation contours' (Lane, 2010; Underhill, 2005). Lane (2010) defines an intonation contour as a pattern of intonation across a thought group, which is a bit like a musical phrase. Intonation contours can change depending on the speaker's intended meaning.

The most important pauses generally follow the rules of written punctuation, and so should be the focus when reading aloud. Remember that speech is fluid, and there are endless possibilities!

Activity 4 Shifting Word Stress for Emphasis

The example question below can be spoken in several different ways depending on the intended meaning. 'Emphatic stress' occurs when a single word is stressed much more than the others in order to draw attention to that word. Underhill (2005) refers to this type of stress as 'prominence'. It is often used to contradict or correct an idea from another person in a conversation, or to check an idea in a question.

Do you want me to cook dinner?

"Do **you** want me to cook dinner?
Possible meaning: I don't really want to cook dinner.

"Do you **want** me to cook dinner?
Possible meaning: The other person is complaining about their cooking skills.

"Do you want **me** to cook dinner?
Possible meaning: I don't really want to cook dinner / Offering to cook dinner

"Do you want me to **cook** dinner?
Possible meaning: I'd rather order something on Foodpanda!

"Do you want me to cook **dinner**?
Possible meaning: Checking information - "I thought you wanted me to make lunch."

Activity 5 Reading Aloud

Helping students bring a written text to life when reading aloud

The sun was shining, the birds were singing, the wind chime was chiming…but all of this was happening on the other side of the window.

"What a wonderful day!" she thought to herself. "Why am I stuck here inside with a mountain of homework to do? Pathetic!"

All of a sudden, there was a knock on the door.

"Hello?" she said.

"Fancy some ice cream?" asked her mother.

"Fantastic!" she yelled.

"There's one catch" her mother said. "We have to stop by your school first."

"Well, that's just great, isn't it?" she said. "I bet they give me more homework."

Activity 6 Reading Aloud - Poems

Please refer to the poems provided in the handout

Poems are an excellent resource for practising elements of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) because they offer a structured yet creative way to focus on essential pronunciation features necessary for intelligible communication in English. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of poetry helps reinforce stress patterns, intonation, and the precise articulation of sounds. By reciting poems, learners can practice the LFC's identified key consonant and vowel sounds in a variety of linguistic contexts, enhancing their ability to be understood in international settings.

Supplementary Activities-Appendix 4

The following slides provide answers to the supplementary and self-study practice activities in the appendices in the handout

Vowel sounds
Distinguishing between short vowel sounds /e/ and /æ/

A common problem for students in Hong Kong is the distinction between the phonemes /e/ and /æ/ (Chan, n.d.). It is useful to compare these sounds using minimal pairs, as this can help demonstrate the difference. It can be helpful to ask learners to listen to examples and think about how and where sounds are formed.

Listen to a volunteer and repeat:

Pat: /pæt/ vs pet: /pet/

Had: /hæd/ vs head: /hed/

In groups, discuss the following questions:

1. What happens to the position of the jaw and the shape of the lips when pronouncing each word?

2. Where does each vowel sound *feel* like it comes from in the mouth? (Please refer to figure 9a on the extra handout.)

3. Do you notice a difference in the length of the vowel sound in this example: had /hæd/ vs hat /hæt/?

- Key takeaway: Sounds are often influenced by adjacent sounds

Practice: Pronouncing /e/ vs /æ/

Volunteer from Table …: Read the following sentences aloud. How are the underlined words pronounced?

- Have a salad made of eggs and apples.
  /hæv ə ˈsæləd/   /e g z ənd ˈæplz./

- I set the cat on the bed. The cat was angry and scratched my leg.
  /set/   /kæt/   /bed/   /kæt/   /ˈæŋgri/   /skrætʃt/   /le g /

- Has anyone got a penny? Yes, but I haven't got many.
  /ˈenɪwʌn/   /ˈpeni/ /jes/   /hævnt/   /ˈmeni/

Practice: Pronouncing /e/ vs /æ/

In pairs, practice reading following words and phrases. See how quickly you can move between the /æ/ and /e/ sounds!

/æ/	sad had dad fad	bat pat paddle	band bland	batter	gas	flash mash
/e/	said head dead fed	bet pet pedal	bend blend	better	guess	flesh mesh

/æ/ and /e/ combinations and tongue twisters

A yellow hat; a red bag; a black dress; angry hens; happy elephants; black and red beds; many men ate bad apples; Jen gambled ten pennies on the game.

Vowels – long sound combinations

In pairs, practice reading the following sentences. Check the accuracy of how you pronounce the long vowel sounds.

a) Do you believe people landed on the moon?

b) She adores her new blue shoes.

c) The blue cheese seems to be free of E-numbers.

d) My heart jumped when I saw the shark in the water.

e) We need to learn how to search for birds and herbs.

Vowels – long and short pairs

1. Practise the following sounds. Exaggerate the longer vowel sound in each pair.

Vowels – long and short pairs

	/i/ vs /iː/	/ʊ/ vs /uː/	/ɒ/ vs /ɔː/	/æ/ vs /ɑː/	/ə/ vs /ɜː/
'short'	hit bid	pull full	cot knot cod	cat Sam had	forget surprise
'long'	heat bead	pool fool	caught naught cord	cart psalm hard	fur sir

2. Practice reading the following long vowel sounds aloud. Notice the spelling patterns.

/iː/ - Seem; dream; feed; exceed; leave; teen; cheese.

/uː/ - Blue; review; shoe; new; two; moon; do; you.

/ɔː/ - Naughty; shore; adore; explore; corn; awful; awesome.

/ɑː/ - Father; car; shark; heart.

/ɜː/ - Stir; dirt; her; occur; earn.

Key takeaway: Focusing on vowel length *can* be confusing for learners, as it is not just the length that changes (Carley et al., 2018).

Practice: Identify the Diphthongs

Identify the word in each row that contains a diphthong.
Practise reading each pair of words aloud. Notice the change in vowel sound.

Spy	Spa
Mate	Met
Did	**Deer**
Tall	**Toil**
Two	**Tour**
Tar	**Tower**

Practice: Diphthong sounds

Match the phrases to the symbols

- take a break
- brown cow
- a poor tour
- over the road
- day by day
- the mind's eye
- point to point
- barely there
- a-hoy!
- clear beer

- pie in the sky
- a pure cure
- a pound of trout
- fair hair
- cold snow

Symbol	Phrases	
/eɪ/		
/eə/		
/aʊ/		
/aɪ/		
/ɔɪ/		
/əʊ/		
/ɪə/		
/ʊə/		

Practice: Diphthong sounds

Bonus question: Can you identify a difference between sounds 1-6 and 7-8?

Symbol	Phrases	
1. /eɪ/		
2. /eə/		
3. /aʊ/		
4. /aɪ/		
5. /ɔɪ/		
6. /əʊ/		
7. /ɪə/		
8. /ʊə/		

Key takeaway: Learners may shorten or replace diphthongs with other short vowel sounds. Focusing on the change in vowel sound and articulation can be helpful.

Word final consonant sounds: The past tense "-ed" consonant clusters

played	worked	loved	started	ended

Notice how the endings of the words above are pronounced differently. Choose the correct answer for each example.

- Worked /kt/ → The –ed is pronounced /t/ because the preceding sound is a <u>voiced/unvoiced</u> consonant.

- Played /eɪd/; Loved /vd/ → The –ed is pronounced /d/ because the preceding sound is a <u>voiced/unvoiced</u> sound.

- Started /ɪd/; Ended /ɪd/ → The –ed ending is pronounced with the extra syllable/ɪd/ when the verb stem ends in ………………………

Word final consonant sounds: The past tense "-ed" consonant clusters

Notice how the endings of the following words are pronounced differently

- Worked /kt/ → The –ed is pronounced /t/ because the preceding sound is <u>an unvoiced consonant</u>.

- Loved /vd/ → The –ed is pronounced /d/ because the preceding sound is <u>a voiced sound</u>.

- Wanted /ɪd/; Ended /ɪd/ → The –ed ending is pronounced with the extra syllable /ɪd/ when the verb stem ends in <u>/t/ or /d/</u>.

Word final consonant sounds: The past tense "-ed" consonant clusters

1. Notice how the endings of the following words are pronounced differently.

The past tense "-ed"

Final /d/ sound	Final /t/ sound	Final /ɪd/ syllable
played	worked	started
failed	stopped	ended
climbed	cooked	decided
loved	laughed	wanted
phoned	typed	hunted

2. Practise reading the following phrases.
a) She stared at the screen until she started to fall asleep.
b) They played tennis in the afternoon and worked in the kitchen in the evening.
c) The cat sniffed the food and walked away.
d) The film ended at 9 o'clock.
e) They cooked dinner and watched TV.

Plural noun endings

How are the plural nouns pronounced in the following sentences? Can you notice any sound-spelling patterns?
In pairs, read the sentences aloud.

- The chefs didn't like the chips.
- Pots, forks and knives were piled up in the sink.
- I saw five foxes in the fields.
- She packed her clothes into the suitcases.
- There were many delicious dishes on the menu.
- The changes happened over days, weeks and months.

Plural noun endings

- The chefs didn't like the chips.
  /ʃefs/   /ʧɪps/

- Pots, forks and knives were piled up in the sink.
  /pɒts/ /fɔːks/ /naɪvz/

- I saw five foxes in the fields.
  /ˈfɒksɪz/   /fiːldz/

- She packed her clothes into the suitcases.
  /kləʊðz/   /suːtkeɪsɪz/

- There were many delicious dishes on the menu
  /ˈdɪʃɪz/

- The changes happened over days, weeks and months.
  /ˈʧeɪnʤɪz/   /deɪz/ /wiːks/   /mʌnθs/

Can you notice any sound-spelling patterns?

Plural noun endings

The final sound of the singular word influences the pronunciation of the plural form.
The following unvoiced final sounds /p/, /f/, /t/, /θ/ and /k/ result in a **/s/** sound (Carley et al., 2018).

- /p/ - chips /ʧɪps/
- /f/ - chefs /ʃefs/
- /t/ - pots /pɒts/
- /θ/ - months /mʌnθs/
- /k/ - forks / fɔːks/

- Other consonants or final vowel sounds --> /z/ sound,
  e.g. clothes /kləʊðz/; days /deɪz/
- When the plural forms another syllable, "es" –
  e.g. dishes /dɪʃɪz/

Source: https://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/phonemic-chart-ia.php

Key takeaway: Sounds are often influenced by adjacent sounds.

Final consonant clusters: /ts/ vs /sts/ and /sp/ vs/ps/ vs /sps/

In a plural noun such as 'pots' /pɒts/, the /t/ and the /s/ sounds are important to pronounce for intelligibility. Students in Hong Kong might not pronounce the /t/ sound clearly (Chan et al., n.d.). In addition, plural forms of words ending in /st/ can be tricky due to the required change in articulation and an interruption of the airflow!

Teacher's tip: work backwards and isolate sounds. Remember that sounds are often influenced by adjacent sounds. In this exercise we will consider the words below in isolation. How the words may be pronounced in connected speech will be addressed in Section 6.

- Mast → mas**ts** (Treat /ts/ as an individual sound! There are some very subtle changes in the individual phonemes in the plural form. The first /s/ sound is slightly shorter, and there is slightly less force in the plosive /t/.)
- Pest → pes**ts**
- Crisp → cris**ps**
- Mask --> mas**ks**

- Cri**sp** → cro**ps** (note the switch in order of the consonant sounds)
- Tongue twisters: The man's last task was to cut the crisp crops.
- We popped to the shops and got some crisps, masks and pots.

Extra challenge: Consonant cluster combinations

As we have seen, consonant clusters can be tricky due to the change in articulation between individual sounds in a cluster.

Use the following sentences to help practice more challenging clusters.

- The clean clothes flapped on the clothesline.

- The flimsy blouse had a pattern of flowers and feathers.

- The plain pearls pleased the pleasant girls.

- The seven silver dishes splashed in the sink.

- Ten brave clowns brought the cows to town.

- The rain dripped down and made the steps slippery.

Common silent letters

Identify the silent letters in column A, then match the corresponding word in column B

A + silent letter	B
climb = B	thumb
muscle = C	█████████████
grandfather = D	█████████████
campaign; sigh = G	█████████████
Graham = h	█████████████
knee = K	█████████████
half = L	█████████████
column = N	█████████████
cupboard = P	█████████████
whistle = T	█████████████
colleague = U	█████████████
answer = W	█████████████

Common silent letters

Identify the silent letters in column A, then match the corresponding word in column B

A + silent letter	B
Climb = b	write; who
muscle	autumn
grandfather	Bonham
campaign; sigh	resign; foreign; might
Graham	science
knee	listen
half	guitar
column	Wednesday
cupboard	receipt
whistle	knife
colleague	thumb
answer	salmon

Primary and secondary stress in multi syllabic words

- Multi-syllabic words may contain both primary and secondary stress. A reliable dictionary will indicate the stress pattern.

- Speakers usually show stress by lengthening the syllable and using a higher pitch.

- How are primary and secondary stress indicated in the transcriptions below?

- /ˌkɑmpəˈtɪʃən/ - COMpeTItion

- /ˌkæləˈfɔːnjə/ - CAliFORnia

Identify the stress patterns

The following words have between 2 and 5 syllables. For each word, answer the following questions:

1. Which syllable holds the main stress?
2. Is the word a single compound noun? If so, which noun holds the main stress?
3. Does the word have both primary and secondary stress? If so, identify these syllables.

remuneration

introduction

argumentative

unprecedented

community

possible

mandatory

mischievous

education

hairbrush

cookery

engineer

prerequisite

notebook

coffee

banana
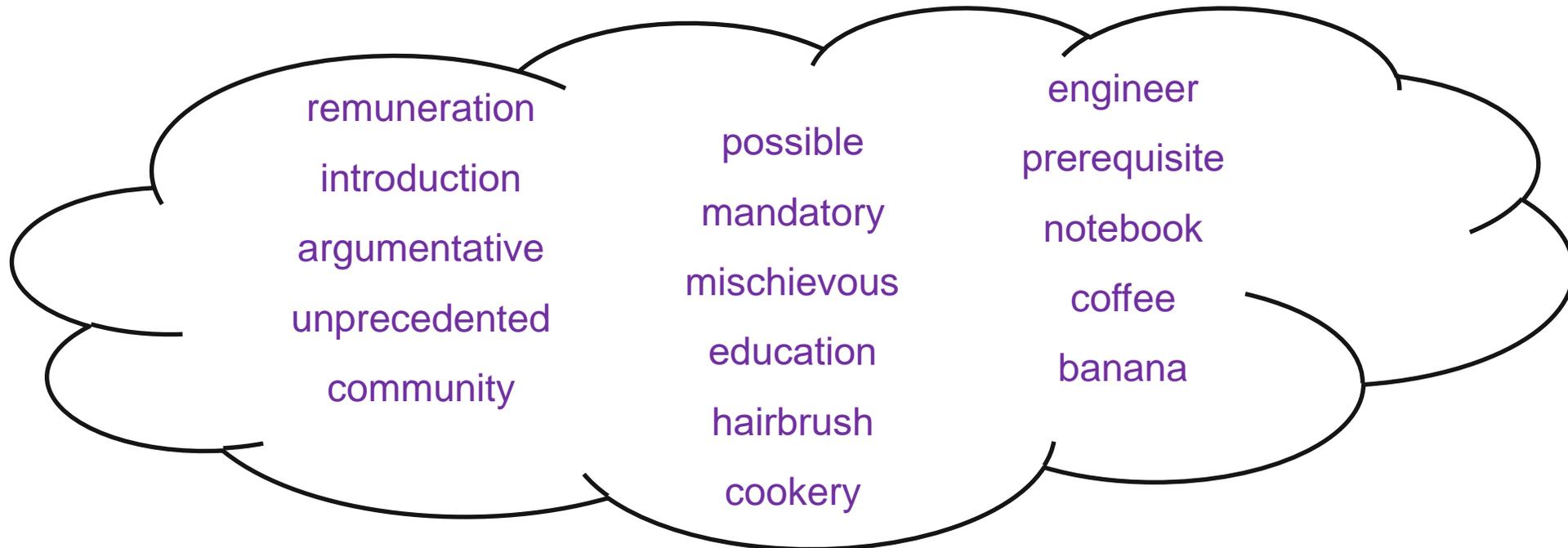
Stress vs 'unstress' and the schwa /ə/

Close your notebook, please!

How would you read the following text aloud? Pay attention to the difference in how the underlined words should be pronounced. In groups, identify some rules.

My cat <u>was</u> sitting on the sofa staring <u>at</u> me.

I asked him, "What <u>are</u> you looking <u>at</u>? <u>Are</u> you hungry?"

"Yes, I <u>am</u>" he replied.

I <u>was</u> shocked! I really <u>was</u>!

Stress vs 'unstress' and the schwa /ə/

The pronunciation of some commonly used grammatical words (e.g., prepositions, auxiliary verbs and conjunctions) changes depending on how and when the word is used. If the word is stressed or emphasised, it is said to have a **strong** pronunciation; if not, the **weak** form is used (Carley et al., 2018). Underhill (2005) refers to weak forms as a part of 'unstress', i.e., words in speech that are not stressed.

The weak form often contains the vowel sound schwa **/ə/**, which is often referred to as a reduced vowel sound (Underhill, 2005). This has the effect of shortening the word.

How would you read the following text aloud? Pay attention to the difference in how the underlined words should be pronounced.

My cat <u>was</u> sitting on the sofa staring <u>at</u> me.

I asked him, "What <u>are</u> you looking <u>at</u>? <u>Are</u> you hungry?"

"Yes, I <u>am</u>" he replied.

I <u>was</u> shocked! I really <u>was</u>!

Stress vs 'unstress' and the schwa /ə/

General features of the schwa

Notice what physically happens when you create this sound - not much! Moving parts of the mouth are not activated.

The sound also commonly appears as the vowel sound in unstressed syllables of multisyllabic words.

Listen to your teacher read the following short text. Identify the schwa sound in weak forms and unstressed syllables

I was walking home from the shops when I heard an odd sound. I thought I was alone as there was nobody around, but then a cat jumped out of the bushes and landed on the ground.

Intonation in question forms and statements

Whilst intonation patterns can be extremely varied, some general patterns in questions and statements can be observed (Underhill, 2005).

Which of the following utterances would have a rising intonation, and which would have a falling intonation?

"What's your name?"

"Do you like coffee?"

"The weather has been so good this week."

"Put your bag on the chair."

"Oh, that's wonderful news!"

"This class is free, isn't it?"

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it?"

Falling tone	Rising tone

(Adapted from Underhill, 2005).

Intonation in question forms and statements

Whilst intonation patterns can be extremely varied, some general patterns in questions and statements can be observed (Underhill, 2005).

Which of the following utterances would have a rising intonation, and which would have a or falling intonation?

Falling tone	Rising tone

(Adapted from Underhill, 2005).

Rapid connected speech: An overview of key features

Whilst an awareness of key features of rapid connected speech and how they impact the comprehension of spoken language for the listener can be useful for learners, it has been suggested in the literature that a focus on developing sentence stress and weak forms in teaching and learning can be more productive in terms of improving communicative competence (Underhill, 2005). It can be helpful for learners to understand that features of connected speech may affect listening comprehension (Carley et al., 2018).

This section provides a brief overview of some key features of rapid connected speech.

- Assimilation
- Catenation
- Elision
- Intrusion

The main reason for these features is that the resulting sound is easier to pronounce at speed.

Assimilation

Assimilation can occur in rapid connected speech at word boundaries when one phoneme changes due to the influence of another, and becomes more similar to this sound, e.g., in handbag, the /nd/ sound often becomes /m/ due to the influence of the following /b/.

/hændbæg/ --> /hæmbæg/

/t/ → /tʃ/

/n/ → /m/

/d/ → /b/

Phrase and rapid connected speech transcription

- Don't you? /dəʊntʃə/

- in bold /ɪmbəʊld/

Question: Why does assimilation happen?

The reason is that the **changed sound** is easier to pronounce at speed.

Catenation

Catenation – consonant + vowel linking

Catenation can occur when a consonant sound at the end of a word joins to a vowel sound at the start of the following word. Again, this is because it makes the phrase easier to pronounce at speed.

Phrase and rapid connected speech transcription

- An injection   /ə nɪnˈdʒekʃən/

- Boiled eggs   /bɔɪl degz/

- An apple   /əˈnæpl/

- I've already finished /aɪ vɔːlˈredi ˈfɪnɪʃt/

Elision

Elision occurs when sounds are omitted. This can happen for both consonant and vowel sounds.

Weak vowel sounds may be omitted after a plosive in a multisyllabic word: police /pəˈliːs/ to / pliːs/; history /ˈhɪstəri/ to /ˈhɪstri/. This can happen to **avoid a consonant cluster**, e.g., fifths and sixths / fɪfθs ænd sɪksθs/ becomes /fɪfsnsɪks/.

Elision of /t/ and /d/ before a consonant is common, particularly when these sounds occur in –ed endings (Carley et al., 2018). Thus, in rapid connected speech, it is common for native speakers to drop the /t/ and /d/. This can also happen for the /p/ and /k/ sounds in the words 'crisps' and 'masks'.

I washed my clothes. /aɪ wɒʃ mɪ kləʊz/

We cooked dinner. /wi kʊk ˈdɪnər/

Crisp → cris**ps**
Mask --> mas**ks**
We popped to the shops and got some crisps, masks and pots.
wiː pɒp tə ðə ʃɒps ən gɒt sʌm krɪs, mɑːs ən pɒts. [Possible rapid connected speech form]

Key takeaway: Elision is a key feature of rapid connected speech. A distinction can be made between pronunciation of words in rapid connected speech and in isolation (i.e., in citation form).

Intrusion

Intrusion: Approximants

Intrusion of approximants /w/, /r/, and /j/ can occur between vowel sounds in order to make pronunciation easier. These sounds are referred to as '**intrusive**' when the linking sound does not occur in either word pronounced individually. In rapid connected speech, the sound is smoother and there is no pause or break between the words due to the intruding sound.

- Intrusive /j/ → we asked → / wiː ɑːskt/ becomes / wiːjɑːskt/

    Tea and coffee /tiːjən kɒfi/

    Me and you /miːjən juː/

- Intrusive /w/ → Just do it → /dʒəs dʊwɪt/
- Intrusive /r/ → /I saw a dog → /aɪ sɔːr ə dɒg/

- **Key takeaway: Intrusion occurs to ease pronunciation.**